

## LETTERS

### DO FALCONS BUILD NESTS?

Except for excavation of the egg cup, falcons are not now generally believed to build nests (L. Brown and D. Amadon 1968, *Eagles, hawks and falcons of the World*, McGraw-Hill, NY:839 and 842). The best (albeit indirect) evidence for nest building in the genus *Falco* is G. L. Richards' (1970, *Condor* 72:476) report that captive American Kestrels (*F. sparverius*) arranged wood chips that had been placed near the scrape during incubation. Although many old publications make reference to falcons refurbishing nests (e.g., G.P. Dement'ev and N.A. Gladkov 1954, *Birds of the Soviet Union*. Vol. 1. Moscow State Publishing House, Moscow, Russia), few recent references do so (e.g., J. Cupper and L. Cupper 1981, *Hawks in focus: a study of Australia's birds of prey*. Jaclin Enterprises, Mildura, Australia).

I know of only one detailed published account of any falcon actually bringing nest materials to the eyrie (J.C. Barber 1979, *Raptor Res.* 13:16). Because I urged Barber to publish the record if he could retrieve the stick, I am partly responsible for the original publication and feel obligated, for the record, to contest the published version of that observation. I visited the Prairie Falcon (*F. mexicanus*) site in question with John C. Barber (JCB) on 7 April 1976, eleven days after he made the reported stick delivery observation. On that visit, I learned: (1) that this was the first Prairie Falcon eyrie JCB had ever visited, (2) that JCB was unaware until my visit that Prairie Falcons were not known to build nests, and (3) that the stick was not taken to the eyrie as JCB later reported in print, but rather it was deposited on a ledge over 30 m from the true eyrie which we located on 7 April.

If the object actually was a stick (versus the dangling tail of a prey item), a likely explanation for its transport to the cliff is not as nesting material as JCB asserted. Rather, it is much more likely that the falcon inadvertently clutched the twig while grasping prey. I have repeatedly seen other raptors clutch a stick or clump of grass along with prey and subsequently fly with vegetation trailing.

An unquestionable observation of a large falcon transporting nesting material (alone, without prey) to its eyrie would be truly remarkable, but JCB's account is not of that quality and should no longer stand uncontested to confuse students of raptor behavior.—**David H. Ellis, U.S. National Biological Survey, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD 20708 U.S.A.**

### OSPREYS USE BALD EAGLE NESTS IN CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA

Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) and Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) share similar breeding habitat in the Chesapeake Bay area and elsewhere. The nests of these species are similar in size and appearance. Ospreys typically build large stick nests in dead trees or on man-made structures (C.J. Henny et al. 1974, *Chesapeake Sci.* 15:125–133; A.F. Poole 1989, *Ospreys: a natural and unnatural history*, Cambridge Univ. Press, NY), while Bald Eagles usually build larger nests in live trees (P.B. Wood et al. 1989, *J. Wildl. Manage.* 53:441–449; Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources, unpubl. data). Osprey nests are usually placed in the open at the top of dead trees or structures, while Bald Eagle nests are usually beneath the tree canopy obscured from view. Both select nest sites close to large bodies of water or wetlands (J.M. Andrew and J.A. Mosher 1982, *J. Wildl. Manage.* 46:383–390; Poole 1989). Eagles nest earlier than Osprey; in the Chesapeake Bay area eagles are on eggs when Ospreys return in March.

Since 1977, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has monitored all known eagle nests in the state by aerial survey. Starting in February of each year, nest sites were monitored for activity at 3–4 wk intervals ending in early June. Since 1977, 449 nests were monitored totaling 1971 known outcomes.

During the 1991 aerial survey, a pair of Ospreys was observed at an unoccupied Bald Eagle's nest in Kent County, Maryland on 25 March. During the next survey flight, on 26 April, the Osprey pair was standing on the nest and two eggs were noted in the nest cup. On 30 May, an adult Osprey was observed in incubating posture on the nest. One young was in the nest on 9 June.

The nest we observed was built by a pair of Bald Eagles and was first used during the 1980 breeding season (Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources, unpubl. data). It was used by eagles each year through 1989, with the exception of 1982. The eagles nested successfully in six of those years, producing a total of 12 young. In 1985, gypsy moth